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Putin Names Separatist Officer as Kremlin Envoy to Russia's Defense Hub

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Artyom Zhoga and Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin has appointed a military officer from occupied eastern Ukraine as his envoy to Russia's Urals region, a key defense industry hub.

Lieutenant Colonel Artyom Zhoga, the chairman of the Russian-installed parliament of Ukraine's Donetsk region, gained fame when he was filmed last December asking Putin to stand for re-election. During the choreographed exchange, Putin agreed to seek a fifth term.

Zhoga, 49, is the father of a pro-Moscow separatist battalion commander who was killed in eastern Ukraine in the early days of Russia's full-scale invasion.

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The Kremlin said Putin met Zhoga on Wednesday to offer him the post of presidential envoy

in Russia’s Urals Federal District, which comprises six regions.

“It’s a big and important job. The Urals is an industrial region with a large number of defense industry enterprises,” Putin told Zhoga.

A presidential decree published that evening named Zhoga the new Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Urals Federal District. He replaces Vladimir Yakushev, whom Putin also dismissed from the Russian Security Council last month.

Presidential envoys liaise between the Kremlin and Russia's regions and oversee their compliance with federal laws as well as the work of federal agencies.

Zhoga is the highest-profile Kremlin appointee to graduate from its “Time of Heroes” professional training program following Putin’s pledge that Ukraine war veterans would become Russia’s “new elite.”

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